To begin with the contract with Pietro, one intriguing aspect that I noticed of the contract is how it balances Perugino's artistic freedom with explicit expectations. The contract specifies, "The predella below is to be painted and adorned with stories according to the desire of the present Abbot" (Canuti, 1931). This clause highlights the patron’s control over the content, illustrating how artists, despite their skills and reputations, were often required to adapt their visions to fit the desires of those who commissioned the works. Yet, it also mentions that the "other ornaments, as may seem suitable to the painter," suggesting a level of trust in Perugino's artistic judgment and expertise. This duality in the contract caught my attention as it reflects the complex negotiation between artist autonomy and patron demands. Further, the contract's stipulation for the artwork to be "embellished with fine gold and other fine colors, as will be most fitting" as well as it being executed as "it befits a good, experienced, honorable, and accomplished master" (Canuti, 1931), suggests that Perugino was not just any craftsman, but a revered artist held in high esteem. The demand for luxurious materials and exquisite craftsmanship underscores the value placed on his work, indicative of a society that highly esteems and respects art and its creators.

As a reader, the formal tone and structured nature of the contract enhance my understanding of the Renaissance art world as a place of complex social negotiations rather than purely creative endeavors. The document helps illustrate how the relationships between artists and patrons were formalized, with clear expectations and severe penalties for non-compliance, indicating the business-like nature of art production in this era. For instance, the contract explicitly states that the work must be completed "within the space of the coming two and a half years, all at the cost and expense of the said master Pietro himself" and that the artist "pledges all his goods, real and movable property, present and future" as a guarantee (Canuti, 1931). This level of detail about deadlines and financial obligations shows the pressures and risks faced by artists like Perugino, who operated under the patronage system.

Moving on, I found the detail in Lorenzo Ghiberti's contract particularly intriguing, where he is given the freedom to decide the size of the statue of St. Matthew, but within a specific framework: it must be "at least as large as the present figure of St John the Baptist of the Guild of Cloth Merchants, or larger if it seems better, at Lorenzo’s discretion" (Chambers, 1970). This clause highlights a delicate balance between Ghiberti’s artistic freedom and the guild's expectations, reflecting a broader societal hierarchy where even renowned artists like Ghiberti operated under the influence and authority of their patrons. I got to understand that Ghiberti held some societal significance during the time, when his authority is subtly indicated through the provision that allows him discretion over the size of the statue. The contract specifies that he may decide whether the statue should be "at least as large as the present figure of St John the Baptist of the Guild of Cloth Merchants, or larger if it seems better, at Lorenzo’s discretion" (Chambers, 1970). This clause is important because it entrusts Ghiberti with the decision-making power to determine a critical aspect of the artwork—its size—based on his own judgment and artistic vision, allowing us as readers to really understand his societal status as an artist. However, the fact that his freedom was bounded by the need to meet or surpass an established standard, set by a previous work, was particularly revealing. It underscored the competitive nature of the art world during the Renaissance, where guilds not only fostered but also constrained creativity, ensuring that their commissioned works both honored their civic pride and maintained or elevated their status in the community.

Continuing on, the resolution of the Wool Guild to commission the statue of St. Stephen reveals a competitive aspect among guilds, where art is used as a status symbol and a tool for civic pride. They intended for the statue to outshine others, aiming to enhance their guild’s prestige, "the figure or image of St Stephen, protomartyr and protector and defender of the said famous Wool Guild, to the honour and reverence of God" (Reading 4). This competitive motive is somewhat different from the religious and aesthetic purposes highlighted in Perugino's contract, where the art's role is more about divine tribute and communal identity.

Conversely to the other contracts Abbot Wibald talks to Godefroi in his letters in great respect and importance to Godefroi as a goldsmith, and it opens up a lot about their professional relationship and how highly Godefroi is regarded. Wibald uses phrases full of respect and acknowledgment of Godefroi's professional standing and expertise. He praises Godefroi's craftsmanship, calling out "your noble talent and your willing and celebrated hand," which doesn't just compliment his skills but also highlights his reputation and reliability in his craft (Reading 3). This praise seems to flatter Godefroi but also serves as a gentle reminder of his esteemed reputation, suggesting his well-established identity and status as a craftsman.

Moreover, Wibald’s tone of polite firmness when reminding Godefroi to focus on the commissioned work subtly hints at Godefroi’s busy schedule, indicating his high demand: "that you may zealously concentrate on the work we have ordered you to do and not in the meantime accept another commission which might hinder the completion of ours" (Reading 3). This direction underscores Godefroi's desirability and busy workload and shows Wibald’s concern that other engagements might divert Godefroi’s attention, a typical situation for a craftsman of high reputation who would be in demand for multiple high-profile projects.

Through the language of respect, I can clearly see the acknowledgment of Godefroi's busy professional life, and the candid discussion of financial issues, the letters paint a complex picture of Godefroi's role as an important but economically dependent goldsmith in medieval society. These insights not only reflect his importance and skills but also the complex interplay of respect, dependency, and personal vulnerability that characterized the lives of medieval artisans. It's intriguing to see how the dynamics of respect and economic dependency play out, offering a window into the nuanced professional lives of medieval craftsmen.

I can imagine similar dynamics today in the art world, especially in how galleries or clients talk to artists. There's often a lot of polite conversation and compliments, but there’s also an underlying business tone where deadlines and expectations are clearly set. Like, a gallery might tell an artist, "We absolutely love your work, it’s so innovative and exciting! Just a reminder, we need your pieces by next month for the upcoming show." It’s this blend of being really supportive but also making sure they’re clear about what they need and when they need it.

Finally, exploring G. G. Coulton's "Artist Life in the Middle Ages" alongside the details of Lorenzo Ghiberti's contract reveals a broader narrative about the evolving role of artists and how societal structures influenced their artistic freedom and recognition. Coulton's depiction of medieval artists, particularly masons, highlights their integral yet often under-recognized contributions to communal and religious life, where personal expression was subtly manifested through masons' marks despite the constraints of monastic orders or guilds. In contrast, Ghiberti's Renaissance context, where he was granted autonomy to decide the size of his sculpture, showcases a shift toward recognizing the artist as an individual with unique visions and skills. This autonomy reflects a societal transition from viewing artists primarily as craftsmen to celebrating them as creators with distinct artistic identities.

This theme of evolving artist recognition is echoed in Pietro Perugino's Renaissance contract with the Benedictine monks, which, like Ghiberti's, situates the artist within a framework of expected duties yet under strict patron specifications. Perugino's contract specified the use of "fine gold" and detailed the thematic elements he was to paint, illustrating the balance between patron control and the recognition of the artist’s technical skills and artistic execution. Here too, artists are seen transitioning from mere executors to recognized contributors to cultural and aesthetic realms, albeit still tightly controlled by their commissioners.

Similarly, the correspondence between Abbot Wibald and the goldsmith Godefroi in the medieval context provides a more personal view into the dynamics of artist-patron relationships. Wibald's letters, which mix commendation with reminders of obligations, reflect a nuanced balance of respect and authority, indicating the goldsmith’s valued but dependent status. This interaction showcases the complex interpersonal elements of artistic commissions, where artists like Godefroi navigated expectations of quality and timely delivery while asserting their professional integrity and negotiating terms of payment and creative control.

Together, these texts underscore the essential role that artists played in their societies, navigating the tension between personal creative expression and the expectations or limitations set by their patrons and societal norms. This comparison illustrates how perceptions and treatments of artists have evolved, marking a transition from art as a communal and functional enterprise to recognizing it as a form of personal expression and innovation, highlighting the shifting dynamics of artists' societal roles and their journey towards greater autonomy and individual acknowledgment in European art history.

Participating in the classroom activity where we assumed the roles of artists and patrons vividly illustrated the dynamics discussed in the texts about Ghiberti, Perugino, and medieval craftsmen. By negotiating artistic visions against specific patron demands, I experienced the tension between creative freedom and contractual obligations. This role-play helped me understand the delicate balance artists must manage, much like Ghiberti who was granted unusual autonomy in his sculpture's size, a liberty that I found empowering during our simulations. Additionally, the polite yet firm communication style we adopted as patrons mirrored the historical correspondence between Abbot Wibald and Godefroi, emphasizing the role of communication in maintaining professional relationships. This activity not only brought historical contexts to life but also deepened my appreciation of the complexities artists navigate, balancing creative integrity with practical constraints, as detailed in the readings.

This exploration into medieval documents has expanded my understanding of how intertwined art, commerce, and societal status were. The reverence for art as a divine and communal contribution evident in these texts challenges the often simplistic view of the Middle Ages as a less culturally sophisticated time. It’s intriguing to connect these historical practices with current ones and realize the continuities and evolutions in how art is commissioned and valued. When talking about the targeted audience, I think the readings were initially aimed at the people directly making and funding the art, like artists and patrons, as well as other guild members who were probably overseeing these projects. But the whole reason for being so specific and strict about the quality and themes of these artworks wasn’t just for their personal satisfaction. It was also because these pieces were going to be public. They were set up in places like churches and guild halls where lots of people would see them.